



Queen Margaret University
EDINBURGH

UNIVERSITY COURT

CONFIRMED Minutes of meeting held on 5 October 2016

PRESENT

Dr Frances Dow CBE (Chair)
Carolyn Bell
Dr Richard Butt
Jim Bradshaw
Professor Graham Caie CBE
Ian Calder
Colin Duffus
Dr Anthony Falconer OBE
Cynthia Guthrie
Dr Anna Gregor CBE

Dr Lindesay Irvine
Frank Lennon
Ken McGarrity
Jackie Macdonald
Miller McLean
Linda McPherson
Megan Richardson
Heidi Vistisen
Professor Petra Wend
Dr Laura Young MBE

IN ATTENDANCE

Professor Fiona Coutts	Dean of School of Health Sciences
Gordon Craig	Head of Planning
Malcolm Cutt	Director of Operations and Finance
Irene Hynd	University Secretary (Secretary)
Steve Scott	Director of Campus and Commercial Services

1 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

The Chair welcomed members and those in attendance to the meeting. Particular welcome was extended to new members Carolyn Bell, Frank Lennon, Ken McGarrity and Dr Laura Young, and to Dr Richard Butt who was attending his first meeting in his new role as Deputy Principal.

Apologies were noted from Margaret O'Connor, Robert Rae and Craig Cathcart.

2 CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

There were no conflicts of interest declared.

3 DETERMINATION OF OTHER COMPETENT BUSINESS

There was no other competent business determined.

4 CHAIR'S REPORT

The Chair advised that the matters that she would have drawn to members' attention were set out in the Principal's report. The Chair would report at each Court meeting on the key sector preoccupations discussed at the Committee of Scottish Chairs (CSC) and the Committee of University Chairs (CUC). That particular cycle of meetings had not yet commenced. The Chair expressed her thanks to those members involved in the recent consultation visit on the review of the Scottish Code of Good HE Governance. Thanks were extended also to those members who had completed the on-line survey as part of the open consultation.

5 PRINCIPAL'S REPORT

5.1 Members RECEIVED a detailed report from the Principal (COURT (16) 26). Particular attention was drawn to the implications of the UK's exit from the EU, the upcoming Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), the Audit Scotland report on higher education in Scottish Universities, and the Scottish Government's recently announced Programme for Government.

5.2 It was SUGGESTED that, despite the challenges and flaws with TEF, it was likely to be in the University's interest to apply for assessment. The approach of other Universities in Scotland would be monitored closely. The matter would be the subject of discussion at the Senate on 26 October.

6 CHANCELLOR OF THE UNIVERSITY

The Court APPROVED the recommendation of the Nominations Committee that Prue Leith, CBE, should be appointed as University Chancellor (Paper COURT (16) 27 refers). The significant work undertaken by the Nominations Committee in securing this appointment was noted.

7 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of Court held on 22 June 2016 (COURT (16) MINS 03) were APPROVED.

8 MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising that were not covered elsewhere in the agenda.

9 FINANCIAL UPDATE

9.1 The Director of Operations and Finance presented a paper (COURT (16) 28) providing an update on the projected out-turn for 2015/16 and the budget risks for 2016/17.

9.2 Members NOTED the forecast surplus of £1.2M for 2015/16, and headroom of £598k in respect of compliance with the loan covenant. While it was NOTED that figures were provisional and subject to an audit check, it was expected that compliance with loan covenants would be met, with a significant margin of comfort.

9.3 The main increases in forecast income from Quarter 3 were in research & knowledge exchange (RKE) and other operating income. Additional funding secured by the Institute for Global Health & Development and Speech & Hearing Sciences accounted for the RKE increase. Within other operating income, the main increase had been from commercial

services (specifically in student accommodation, both in term time and over the summer). In response to a query, the Director of Operations and Finance advised that the increase in depreciation costs from Quarter 3 was due to additional works undertaken on the student residences.

- 9.3 It was noted that, following the implementation of the new HE SORP, the surplus figure reported for 2015/16 would change. However, Barclays had confirmed that, for the purposes of reporting against the loan covenant, the pre-SORP figures could be used for 2015/16. The final accounts would be presented in the new format. The Director of Operations and Finance agreed to provide an explanation of the impact of the new SORP at the meeting of Court on 7 December.
- 9.4 Members NOTED that, although at this stage of the year it was difficult to be definitive on the likelihood of a risk materialising, the main risk to meeting the 2016/17 budget was the achievement of an additional net contribution of £250k from collaborative partnerships. The situation was challenging, with expansion in some areas but unexpected downturns in other areas. Alternative markets and alternative models of collaborative working were being identified and pursued, including articulation opportunities in the USA and Canada. It was also noted that a portfolio audit being undertaken by the University was intended to facilitate the development of a more internationally attractive portfolio.
- 9.5 Members were advised of concerns emerging across the sector regarding a downturn in the conversion of international student acceptances to matriculation. Investigations were ongoing, but the UK's forthcoming exit from the EU and messages coming from the UK Government on international students were believed to be contributory factors.
- 9.6 Although not included in the paper, members NOTED the recent additional SFC capital funding of £23M in 2016/17 for the HE sector announced as part of the Programme for Government. The University's share of this was £375k.

10 KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

- 10.1 The Court RECEIVED a report showing the KPIs for the fourth quarter 2015/16 (COURT (16) 29). It was noted that some figures were still being finalised as part of the detailed out-turn for 2015/16. These would be included in the final end year position for 2015/16 to be reported to Court at its next meeting on 7 December.
- 10.2 The sustained increase in research active staff numbers was NOTED. The extent to which this would influence research student numbers was queried. Members were advised that research student numbers had increased from 2014/15 (albeit not up to the challenging target set) and it was anticipated that this increase would continue as the increase in research active staff consolidated.
- 10.3 Members APPROVED proposed KPI targets for 2016/17 (COURT (16) 30) and NOTED that further work was planned during the year on some KPI areas.
- 10.4 Members CONSIDERED an analysis of the results of the 2016 National Student Survey (NSS), which reported a clear upward trend over the last six years in all statements within the survey. QMU's overall satisfaction rate had increased by 1% to 86%, back to the same result as in 2014, and QMU's highest since the first NSS results in 2011. Results for the Assessment and Feedback, Academic Support, and Learning Resources categories had increased. The best two categories remained Teaching on my Course and Personal Development. A number of subject areas had performed very strongly, which would be important in the context of the emerging TEF criteria.

- 10.5 Issues regarding the question on the student union were discussed. Members were advised that often students interpreted the question as referring to catering and social facilities (eg, the bar), whereas it was meant to refer to the overall service offered by the Union. It was confirmed that the question in the 2017 NSS had been changed to clarify this.
- 10.6 In response to a query, it was confirmed that the full results, along with detailed comments, would be the subject of detailed analysis and action within each of the two Schools, overseen by the NSS Results Working Group and the Student Experience Committee. Deans, Heads of Division and Programme Leaders had been provided with individual results packs, including detailed students' comments. Full results were also available to all staff, and to Court members, on the University intranet. Action Plans were required to be produced by the end of October. Senate would also be considering the results in detail. It was NOTED that the NSS is an external survey and the University had no influence on the compilation of the results. Any significant underlying issues within the survey results would have made it very difficult for the University to have achieved its high and improved scores.

(Secretary's note: Full results, comprising 24 tables, are at the following link - <http://intranet.qmu.ac.uk/sites/nssResults/default.aspx>)

11 LOCAL LAND – MASTERPLAN DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

- 11.1 The Director of Operations and Finance and Director of Campus and Commercial Services presented a paper updating the Court on progress with the development of the land adjacent to the campus (COURT (16) 32).
- 11.2 It was NOTED that East Lothian Council had now approved a draft local development plan which had been issued for public consultation. The plan mentioned the designation of the land adjacent to QMU for 'economic uses that support the key sectors of learning, life sciences and food and drink'. It also mentioned completing the A1 junction access to QMU.

MINUTE REDACTED – Part of the record of discussion under Minute 11 is exempt from disclosure under Section 33 (1) (b) of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002

- 11.5 A recent development in Ayr for SMEs was highlighted and it was suggested that this should be investigated as a good practice model for SME accommodation.

12 SCOTTISH FUNDING COUNCIL

- 12.1 Members HOMOLOGATED the Annual Report to the Scottish Funding Council on the Institutional led Review of Quality (COURT (16) 33).
- 12.2 Members HOMOLOGATED the University Court Statement of Assurance to the Scottish Funding Council (COURT (16) 34).
- 12.3 Members NOTED the interim Ministerial Letter of Guidance 2017-18 to SFC and the Guidance from SFC to Universities on the development of Outcome Agreements: 2017 -18 to 2019-20 (COURT (16) 35). The Letter of Guidance did not contain any indication of levels of funding for SFC in 2017/18. It was unlikely that this information would be available before December 2016. The Outcome Agreement Guidance did not contain any significant changes from previous guidance. It was confirmed that Court would receive a draft Outcome Agreement in February 2017 and Senate would also be asked for input into the development of the Outcome Agreement.

13 GOVERNANCE – COURT EFFECTIVENESS REVIEW

- 13.1 Members RECEIVED a paper (COURT (16) 36) providing an update on the implementation of the review action plan.
- 13.2 The Chair provided an oral update on the initial meeting of the short life working group considering the Terms of Reference of Court Committees. Members were reminded that the group had been charged in particular with considering how the Court might appropriately be advised of any HR matters. While the working group had still to conclude its thinking, at this stage its position was that, given the size and structure of the University, any HR issues of strategic importance should come directly to Court. Members were invited to write to the University Secretary with any particular thoughts concerning the type of strategic issue that Court might appropriately consider.
- 13.2 Members APPROVED the arrangements for the appraisal of Court Members and the Chair of Court (COURT (16) 38).

14 HIGHER EDUCATION GOVERNANCE (SCOTLAND) ACT

Members RECEIVED a verbal update from the Chair and University Secretary. A meeting of Clerks of Court or equivalent was being arranged in late October to discuss the implications of the Act. The University Senate would also be considering the relevant issues in terms of academic board membership at its meeting on 26 October. It was NOTED that the implications of the Act would need to be incorporated into the review of the Scottish Code of Good HE Governance.

15 ANNUAL REPORT ON COMPLAINT HANDLING

Members RECEIVED a report on the management of complaints made to the University during 2015/16 (COURT (16) 38). The low level of Scottish Public Services Ombudsman referrals was NOTED and commended.

16 SENATE

The Court RECEIVED the minutes of the Senate meeting held on 22 June 2016 (SEN (16) MINS 04). All relevant matters arising were covered elsewhere on the Court agenda.

17 AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE

- 17.1 Members RECEIVED the minutes of the Audit and Risk Committee meeting held on 13 September (AUDIT (16) MINS 03).
- 17.2 It was NOTED that the Committee had given significant consideration to addressing risks associated with information security. A risk based prioritisation approach to the relative actions was being implemented and it was confirmed that the University's Strategic Investment Plan had funds identified to take this forward. It was confirmed that any cultural issues within IT had been addressed.

18 FINANCE AND ESTATES COMMITTEE

Members RECEIVED the minutes of the Finance and Estates Committee held on 19 September 2016 (FEC (16) MINS 05). All matters arising were dealt with under the Financial update (COURT (16)28) and Local Land – Masterplan Development Strategy (COURT (16) 32).

19 HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE

- 19.1 Members RECEIVED the minutes of the Health and Safety Committee meeting held on 21 September 2016 (HSC (16) MINS 04).
- 19.2 It was NOTED that, following the installation of a smoking shelter, the level of smoking in the University square has decreased significantly.

20 SENIOR MANAGEMENT REMUNERATION COMMITTEE

- 20.1 Members RECEIVED the unconfirmed minutes of the Senior Management Remuneration Committee held on 29 September 2016 (SMRC (16) MINS 01).
- 20.2 Members APPROVED amendments to the Senior Management Remuneration Review Policy as set out in Appendix 2 of the SMRC minutes. In the course of a full discussion of the policy, and of the nature of the decisions made in accordance with it by the SMRC, Court members expressed a desire to keep the future implications of this policy under review.
- 20.3 Members of Court NOTED the proposal that the University should develop a policy statement setting out its position in relation to the impact of legislative changes on the taxation of employee pensions and were content that the Director of Operations and Finance should draft such a statement for approval by Court at its meeting on 7 December.
- 20.4 Members recorded their appreciation of the work of the retiring Convener of SMRC, and noted that the recently appointed Vice Chair of Court, Linda McPherson, had now assumed the role.

(Note: members of staff of the University who were not elected staff members of Court withdrew for item 20).

21 MEMBERS DEMITTING OFFICE

The Court NOTED that this was the last meeting for Dr Anna Gregor. The Court thanked Dr Gregor for her contribution and wished her well for the future. Although unable to attend, the Court also NOTED that this would have been the last meeting for Craig Cathcart, Senate appointed member. Similarly, the Court noted his significant contribution to its work.

22 COURT MEMBERS HANDBOOK

Members were provided with an individual copy of the revised Court Members Handbook, publication date October 2016.

23 DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS

Court will meet on the following dates:

7 December 2016

8-9 February 2017 (Court Away Days)

5 April 2017

28 June 2017

With the exception of the Court Away Days, all meetings commence at 4.00pm.